



Perceptions of General Education Teachers about Inclusion in Higher Education

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Abstract: *Inclusive education is a growing problem for all nations. The aim of the study was to explore the teacher's perception of inclusion in higher education. The qualitative approach was used by using a basic qualitative research design, a semi-structured interview guide. The sample of the study consisted of 12 professors from public and private universities of Lahore who have a system of inclusive education. Data was collected through a purposive sampling technique. The literature review and the interview guide both served as sources for themes. The conceptual framework used consisted of five components like self-awareness, teacher motivation, administrative support, classroom management, and differentiated instruction. For the analysed data Thematic analysis technique was used. The results of the study reported that the intuitions that work in inclusive education systems lack the necessary teacher training, infrastructure, and aids to assist pupils with special needs. The institutions need to invest more in teacher training programmes, accessibility, and technological equipment.*

Key Words: General Education, Teachers, Higher Education, Inclusive Education

Introduction and Background of the Study

According to Alquraini & Gut (2012) All the learners, regardless of any difficulties are enrolled in age-appropriate general education courses in their local schools to get top-notch instruction, interventions, and support to help them succeed in the core curriculum through inclusive education.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, is the special education law that forces students with disabilities must be included in the general education classroom. It is mandatory the classroom should have the least restrictive atmosphere that can suit the requirements of all students is the ultimate

objective of many institutions (Brownell et al., 2005).

Marques, J., & Bannon, I. (2010) Stated that for a long time, there has been much debate about including special needs pupils in regular education classes. All students are considered members of the school community, regardless of their talents and limitations, under inclusion education. It's not necessary to transfer disabled students to another university. They should have complete access to all of the social interactions and resources that are available in the general education classroom.

Presently, inclusive education is regarded

as a crucial component of all educational policies. Later, it is crucial to comprehend the cultural characteristics of educational contexts and the larger associations and organizations of the entire society in order to promote and improve inclusive education (Ainscow & César, 2006).

According to Silverstein (2012) despite the many definitions and approaches, teachers play a critical role in the successful implementation of inclusive policies.

Bailey (2004) said that the primary barrier to teachers accepting inclusion policies is the difficulties they meet in the classroom. This is likely to damage their confidence and enthusiasm for putting the rules into practice. In order to implement the policies, we must first assist the instructors and remove any hurdles in inclusive classrooms.

Monsen, J., (2012) expressed that the requirement for students with disabilities to be in the least restrictive environments and to have access to the general curriculum is a significant contributing element to an increase in the number of students in inclusive education.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) places a significant emphasis on the least restrictive environment (IDEA). Students with disabilities have the opportunity to receive education alongside students without disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Institutions arrange them appropriately based on their disabilities so they can pursue their educational objectives. Additionally, teachers and instructors support disabled students so they can readily access the general education curriculum and take part in extracurricular activities. They are given additional support and services by the organization or institution, enabling them to meet their educational objectives (Boyle et al., 2015).

Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001) explained that inclusion is a teaching philosophy or state of mind where children actively interact with their peers who are not impaired. They think that encouraging practical achievement through inclusiveness governs how teachers adapt to student variations. The inclusion of learners

with special needs in the standard education curriculum, in the opinion of many educators, improves all students as they collaborate in the classroom.

The most recent marginalized group to make progress toward equal opportunity in education is students with disabilities. They are taking the same route as people with low incomes, members of racial and ethnic minorities, and women. Federal rules aim to provide students with disabilities with the right services and support and forbid discrimination against them. Giving disabled students wider access to elementary and secondary school was the first step, and options for higher education are now increasingly being highlighted. This study focuses on the unique challenges that students with disabilities meet as they complete their education in elementary and secondary schools, transfer to colleges and universities, and receive accommodations there (McLaughlin et al., 2005).

Sharma narrated that (2015) must consider the effects of inclusion as part of their everyday teaching duties. They should be required to develop the necessary skills and competencies to cope with the practical aspects of an inclusive educational environment in addition to being prepared and willing to integrate students with disabilities into their classrooms.

The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of general education teachers' perceptions, as well as to identify the best inclusion strategies and strategies already in place to address the requirements of students with disabilities in inclusive settings at a higher level. A lot of teachers are resistant to inclusion because they don't know how to give children with disabilities the right support.

The Rationale of the Study

Numerous types of research have been done to investigate the Perceptions of General Education Teachers about Inclusion in Higher Education. According to Jordan, J. (2015), the inclusion model in the educational setting is an approach to educating students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Under this

approach, students with disabilities and special educational needs receive most or all of their education and time within the classroom setting integrated with students who do not have a disability.

Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001) explained that inclusion is a teaching philosophy or state of mind where children actively interact with their peers who are not impaired. They think that encouraging practical achievement through inclusiveness governs how teachers adapt to student variations. The inclusion of learners with special needs in the standard education curriculum, in the opinion of many educators, improves all students as they collaborate in the classroom. Inclusive education is promoted internationally but in Pakistan, it needs to highlight the lacking points in inclusion at the higher education level. There are many institutions that provide inclusive setups. In this research study, the perception of general education teachers will check about inclusive education and also the lagging points in institutions against five components self-awareness, teacher motivation, administrative support, classroom management, and differentiated instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to highlight the perceptions of teachers about inclusion in higher education.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted to

1. Explore the perceptions of teachers about inclusion at a higher education level.
2. Identify the teachers' beliefs about classroom management and peer collaboration in inclusion at the higher education level.
3. Investigate how a teacher perceives their ability to teach a student with a disability influenced by training and experience.
4. Identify the challenges the teachers faced while teaching in inclusive education.

Question of the Study

The study is conducted to answer the following questions;

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of inclusion in higher education?
2. What are the teachers believe about classroom management and peer collaboration in an inclusive classroom?
3. How do teachers perceive their ability to teach students with disabilities influenced by training and experiences?
4. What are the challenges that the teachers faced while teaching in inclusive education?

Significance of the Study

For the institution, stakeholders, and policymakers, the study will be useful. The perception of general education teachers at the higher education level needs to be looked into. Due to our multisector education system and lack of unified education, frequent researchers and their colleagues are equally necessary for the context of Pakistani educational culture. The administrators will benefit from this study's chances to uncover teacher perceptions that act as barriers to inclusive education and enhance their teaching and learning processes. They should be aware of the kind of difficulties and challenges faced by teachers of inclusive education when working with kids who have disabilities. It is necessary for influential and well-known university decision-makers to comprehend, assist, and provide general education teachers with knowledge about how to teach students with disabilities. In order to better understand the challenges, problems, worries, and requirements of teachers in inclusive classrooms, the researcher has chosen teachers as the primary respondents in her study. They receive support from responsible organizations, who also give them access to infrastructure and the right teaching resources.

Research Design

The study is phenomenological in nature. In order to achieve the study's goals, a qualitative research approach was used. As qualitative

research methodologies are used to investigate the views of the individual regarding particular facets of life it took in-depth knowledge to comprehend the research in order to comprehend the special education teacher's perspective on inclusion in higher education. The fundamentals of qualitative research are taken from phenomenology, symbolic interaction, and constructionism, and the researcher uses both his or her own knowledge and the data acquired from the participants to

make sense of the participants' experiences.

Population, Sampling and Participants

Ten professors from various Lahore universities were selected as the sample of the study, which was gathered by using a purposive sampling design. In Lahore, there are five universities that support the inclusion system. The number of participants chosen from these 5 universities is shown in the enlisted table.

Table 1. Institutes Selected for Semi-Structured Interviews of Special Education Teachers

S. No	Institutes	Teachers
1.	University of Management and Technology, Lahore	3
2.	Education University of Lahore	3
3.	Govt. College and University of Lahore	2
4.	Lahore college and university for women Lahore	2
5.	Punjab university Lahore	2

Inclusion Criteria

For additional study work, the participants who met the inclusion criteria were chosen. The selection of participants using inclusion criteria revealed the fundamental elements of the study.

For inclusion, there were:

1. Teachers working in an inclusive environment
2. Assisting students with disabilities in any area of study
3. Spent some time working in higher education's inclusive education
4. The study's participants' willingness to participate.

Data Collection Method

The study's phenomenological technique was applied in a qualitative research design to comprehend the teacher's perspective. So information from the participants was gathered for this aim using the semi-structured interview guide. The greatest method for gathering information from participants is through interviews, which give the words and ideas of the participants their true meaning. It supports addressing numerous issues in a manner that is both socially and naturally acceptable.

English was used to create the interview guide. There were two steps to it, and they were

1. Information on demographics
2. Questions on how they view inclusion in higher education (Conceptual framework).

Validity of the Interview Guide

The three experts received an interview guide to be evaluated for validation purposes. The interview guide was given to the experts, who were from the department of Special Education at UMT, and they were asked to validate it in accordance with the following criteria: questions should be pertinent to the research issue, and they are clear in meaning and understanding. They could provide comments for the question's correction if they feel any questions are irrelevant.

Pilot Study

In order to estimate the success of the semi-interview guide methodology, data were first gathered for the research's pilot study. Two people were chosen for an interview for the pilot project. Prior to the interview, the study's protocol was finished. The researcher made an effort to get information from the interviewees in order to better grasp their perceptions of this element.

Table 2. Sample of Pilot Study

S. No	Institutes	Teacher
1.	University of Management and Technology Lahore	1
2.	Education University of Lahore	1

The results of the pilot study demonstrated that the participants could understand the questions and that the content was understandable to them. It demonstrated that the interview schedule was correct and suitable for the primary investigation.

Data Analysis

According to Marques, J., & Bannon, I. (2010) the most crucial aspect of the study is the data analysis of the information gathered. Thematic analysis was employed because the research was qualitative. The data were coded in accordance with the study's theoretical and literary sources, and the interview guide was then analyzed as necessary (Clark & Braun, 2013).

The majority of themes were understood at the semantic or unambiguous level. When

coding, it is necessary to go beyond concepts that are constructed with the teacher's perspective on inclusion in higher education and its underlying assumptions. Microsoft Excel was used to organize the tables and facilitate comparing the data gathered from diverse participants in the thematic process.

Ethical Considerations

It was made sure that ethics will be taken into mind during the research. The entire process was carried out in accordance with ethical standards.

Results of the Study

The information gathered through the interview guide was transformed into themes. A quick overview of the theme is shown in the table below.

Table 3. Themes Generated from Semi-structured Interview Guide

Themes	Sub-themes
Understanding the structure of the inclusive classroom	Work experience with special students' approaches to teaching children with special needs in inclusion, acceptance of the teachers
Teachers' conscientiousness about the nature of students	The motivation of teachers, classroom strategy and teaching
Workplace Frustration	Student need assessment, curriculum, communicate effective, technical support
Nurturing inclusive environment	Belongingness, motivation of teachers, peers' cooperation
Administrative attitudes and support	Provision of resources

From the semi-structured interview, the themes were extracted. Here is a discussion of the topics and their sub-themes.

Teachers' Understanding of the Structure of Inclusive Classroom

The phenomenology was investigated by university professors, and it emerged from the interview that the professors, who are instructing students with special needs in

inclusive classes, have their own views on inclusion. The teachers were questioned regarding their knowledge of teaching special needs students as well as the methods they employed to comprehend the idea of inclusion and manage the inclusive class in order to better understand the teaching of inclusive classes. Moreover, the sub-themes of the main theme are elaborated as:

Work Experience with Special Needs Students

Eight out of twelve professors responded that they had experience working with students with special needs. However, they still found it challenging to work with the class's exceptional children (Participant 8).

According to another teacher, exceptional children were told to ask for assistance when they needed it for their curriculum or for any other problem relating to their studies or personal lives. However, they did not annoy the teachers and completed all of their work independently (Participant 9).

Approaches to Teach Students in Inclusion

Teachers asserted that they made use of a range of strategies to provide a learning environment for students with special needs in the class. There is time-consuming work to be done while we are in class; teachers had to work on the curriculum and delivery techniques (Participant 8).

The participant talked about the challenges they faced while instructing an inclusive class, and how teachers needed to be ready for this (participant 9).

Another participant said that the instructor employed a variety of methods to explain the course material and aid the students in understanding their own work (participant 1).

One more participant expressed that when creating curricula, it should be kept in mind that some students may have difficulty understanding the syllabuses. Most PhD and Post Doc teachers are not followed (participant 4).

Acceptance of the Teachers

The development of special pupils is more the responsibility of inclusive education teachers. When a teacher accepts the students in the class, it inspires them and welcomes other students with special needs in the inclusive class (participant 1).

Since they had previously worked with other special students, the other teacher's expertise with inclusive education helped them better understand the needs of the students. As a result, the instructors support them as they progress and offer assistance as needed (Participant 7).

Teachers' Conscientiousness about the Nature of Students

The depth of experience in inclusive education increases conscious knowledge of the changes brought about by the teacher's inclusion-friendly attitude. Teachers in inclusive settings cooperated with unique pupils and showed tolerance in the classroom because they had conscientious personalities.

A participant reported that in the inclusive classroom because classes are delivered using both written and sign language, the workload is increased for those who teach hearing-impaired students (participant 3).

A participant expressed that in the inclusive classroom when impaired students give their presentations normal pupils thought their time was being wasted, so I tried to get them to participate in class by putting them in groups. Despite this, they treat them collectively and returned the classroom to normal (participant 8).

One more teacher shared his experience with the inclusive classroom. For a student with a hearing or vision impairment, we created a peer group. Because of this, regular pupils accept them (participant 11).

Motivation of Teachers

As one participant in the interview noted that Motivation is the desire to accomplish a particular objective. It depends on a number of variables that affect their in-service practice in inclusive education. There are no incentives or certificates given to the teachers. In the future, administrative commendation for hard work may be feasible. But such policies are not in place now or in the past (Participant 3).

During the interview, some participants expressed sorrow over the fact that they never received any support from the institution despite being general professors who also work with special needs learners (Participant 1).

Classroom Strategy and Teaching

It is difficult for teachers to manage and employ many methods to get their point across to students in inclusive classrooms. In inclusive education, teachers had to get ready for both learners (participant 3).

One participant responded as they made several accommodations for the special students. They offer them counselling hours so that they can go to them if they need more instruction on a subject they don't comprehend in class. Teachers supported them and gave them advice in order to aid them (participant 5).

Some of the children in inclusive classrooms have physical limitations, and managing a class can be challenging. This impacts both the classroom climate and the level of discipline. Teachers assisted the children with special needs in order to maintain proper control over the class (Participant 8).

Work Place Frustration

Because they must address the requirements of both impaired and non-disabled students, inclusive teachers experience increased stress and dissatisfaction while instructing inclusive classes (participant 4).

Curriculum

Special needs students didn't follow the same curriculum as other students. So they are taught according to their abilities (participant 2).

In order for every student in the class to appreciate the lecture, the professors had to tailor their lectures to the group. According to a teacher, we prepare lectures in a way that is necessary since we are skilled at making them engaging for everyone (Participant 11).

Effective Communication

According to a participant, it is the teacher's duty to close any gaps in communication. For this, we attempted to get the class to talk about their prior experiences and how appropriate peer groups were for them. Due to this, the communication barriers caused by their visual and auditory handicap are reduced, and a collaborative environment is created between them (Participant 12).

Technical Support

Technical assistance and inclusive education are required to meet the demands of special learners. Machines and tools used by special students with physical limitations are referred to as technical support (Participant 6).

Nurturing Inclusive Environment

Belongingness

Without considering its social elements, certain sensations of belonging are what bring people together. Since there are several class kinds and we think that students have various levels of intelligence, as a teacher they expressed their viewpoint and I never felt hesitant to include them in class (Participant 1).

Give them respect, make eye contact, and motivate them first. Furthermore, they require supportive actions (Participant 8).

Peer Support

A participant noted that newcomers are really helpful to special needs individuals. They always provide their full support whenever I combine disabled with regular because they understand that it is an educational tool (Participant 6).

They are accommodating and friendly at all times (Participant 1).

The teacher explained that encouraging collaboration among all pupils is the true purpose of creating an inclusive classroom environment (Participant 5).

Administrative Attitudes and Support

At the higher education level, inclusive education is dependent on the administration's crucial role and the strategies they apply in the institutions. A participant said that the institution provides wheelchairs, escalators, and ramps for pupils who are handicapped and cannot use the university's stairs (Participant 1).

Provision of Resources

Resources are required for inclusive education because managing inclusive classes without ICT or interpreters is challenging. Students and faculty at this university have access to a variety of materials, which helps them to learn effectively. According to a participant, the administration often offers the facility when needed (Participant 5).

We occasionally receive resources like a sign interpreter in our class named Miss Farhat. However, this facility is typically not offered for the full amount. It ought to be adequately offered (Participant 4).

Finding of the Study

Research Question 1: What are the teachers' perceptions about inclusion in higher education?

The majority of participants said that inclusive educators embrace students with disabilities without making any distinctions based on their social, economic, or financial circumstances.

The majority of participants expressed favourable attitudes about inclusive classes because they saw it as a learning experience and believed they lacked the information and abilities necessary to teach special needs children. Although they were educated, teachers contend that these things are experienced via practice rather than through classroom learning.

The majority of participants also stated that they found it challenging to teach inclusively without the assistance of an interpreter because they lacked the necessary skills and experience to deal with unique students. In order to compensate for the lack of

an interpreter in the classroom, professors tried to record their lectures and distribute the recordings to special students so that they could study and understand the material.

Out of the 12 participants, 4 individuals had a negative attitude toward inclusion and said it had little impact on kids, arguing that this approach needs to be rethought and revised.

The majority of the Teachers with a maximum of 14 years of experience believed that if certain requirements were met, an inclusive system may succeed. Teachers had to work harder to help children who had learning impairments. Additionally, it was observed that the effectiveness of the students in inclusive classes is also impacted by the greater class size.

Research Question 2: What are the teachers believe about classroom management and peer collaboration in an inclusive classroom?

Managing a class requires experience in inclusive environments. The administration takes inclusivity into consideration while designing a class. According to one participant, the classrooms have a sound system, multimedia, and other resources that are suitable for students with special needs. There are ramps available for these students as well as wheelchairs for the disabled. Special pupils have reserved the first rows of the classroom so that they won't have any trouble finding a seat.

On the other side, some participants complained that the classrooms lacked furnishings and were in appalling shape.

According to research findings, the students in the class created an interactive environment. As mentioned by the teachers, they made an effort to instil love, harmony, and caring in the children from the beginning of the lesson. Teachers urged pupils to share their experiences since everyone should be aware of one another's hardships and enthusiasm for learning. The students' sense of belonging grew in this manner.

The majority of the participants said that teachers sometimes put handicapped and non-

disabled students together because they sometimes felt exhausted when presentations were given to disabled pupils. Despite this, the class didn't lose the learners' interest. Teachers have occasionally noted that the typical children are not contributing to the group, thus it is the teacher's duty to motivate the non-disabled pupils to assist.

The majority of the management systems addressed both equipment and peer cooperation. The interactive classroom setting fosters comfort and produces results that support students' futures.

Research Question 3: How do teachers perceive their ability to teach students with disabilities influenced by training and experiences?

It is believed that inclusion is a modified kind of formal education in which institutions give various student populations chances by including them. The idea of exclusion from traditional institutions is diminished. The involvement of impaired learners in educational settings helps them to build a positive self-concept and lessens their negative attitudes.

Teachers' perspectives on their involvement in inclusive education. 12 out of the 3 participants said they had pre-service before enrolling in an inclusive class. While other teachers were not aware of the managing aspect, these teachers had received training on how to accept exceptional pupils in inclusion.

Institutions were required to offer high-quality instruction, it is their duty to provide in-service training. Some participants complained that the pieces of training were too brief for them and did not last long enough.

However, other educators declared that they never went to any pre-service or in-service training sessions. They perceived that in order to bridge the gap between students, they used books and other resources. The government did not provide any assistance, therefore they had to use their own resources to meet their needs. They believed that the effective implementation of inclusive institutions was a result of their experience and practice.

Research Question 4: What are the challenges the teachers faced while teaching in inclusive education?

Teachers experienced difficulty in adapting the lesson as a result of inclusive education. Teachers expressed their opinions after having to deal with classroom discipline concerns.

Participants expressed their belief that disabled learners learn slowly and that other pupils struggled in the classroom.

Another participant mentioned that the accessibility in the classroom causes disruptions. Special needs students arrived late for the presentation and made noise in the class (wheelchair noises or tapping for a seat). After that, the instructor had to provide them with a recording of the lesson.

The situation that presents the most difficulty is curriculum adaptation. All assessments are based on the curriculum because it is content-specific for a given course. As opposed to impaired learners who have a limited curriculum, normal pupils have a comprehensive curriculum for assessment.

Institutions treated all students equally, even those without disabilities. All pupils should have access to related equipment as part of inclusive education.

Discussion

Teachers played a key role in developing a student's career. Inclusive teachers are the teachers who help students with special needs. Research showed that the general teachers showed fatigue, and tiredness but special education teachers showed a positive attitude towards inclusive education and count their experiences as a part of their career development. They reported that the inclusive setting is beneficial for students with disabilities (Altinok, N. [2012](#)).

According to Hernandez, G. ([2006](#)) inclusive education has provided students with disabilities the right to be treated equally and offered the same educational opportunities as other students. Students with disabilities can attend regular schools thanks to inclusive education. The integration of impaired children

with non-disabled students in inclusive environments gives them a chance to succeed academically and become active members of society.

De Boer (2011) said that it is the teacher's role to teach both students with disabilities and non-disabilities, inclusive environments are more dependent on the effectiveness of the teacher than just the administration. The educational environment is supported by the teachers' attitudes and actions. Participants exhibited favourable attitudes toward the class's disabled pupils and also assisted them in understanding their working environments.

The study's conclusions demonstrated that pre-service and in-service activities have an impact on teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. Programs that support teachers in teaching kids with disabilities and have a beneficial effect on both special needs students and typical students are needed. Teacher pre-service training should be provided (Avramidis et al., 2007).

The professors agreed with the suggestion to include special needs pupils in the normal class. In this study, it was discovered that instructors emphasized the need for the educational sector to provide support and services for teachers with special needs, such as a translator for deaf pupils and a braille instructor for the teacher and students (Frederickson et al., 2007).

Hwang, Y. & Evans, D. (2011) claimed that it is very clear that ordinary schools do not provide disabled kids with the necessary accommodations, and that these schools also do not accurately portray inclusive education. The administration must provide for the needs

of the pupils in order to close the gap between them and the inclusive class.

Wong, D. (2004) examined that general teachers' opinions on inclusive policies in higher education. The inclusive education system is reportedly in use worldwide, however, this study raised the issue of how successful it is. The results demonstrated that the teacher's conception of inclusion differed from the contexts in which it really occurred.

Recommendations

The recommendations listed below are as follows:

1. Before employing inclusive instructors in inclusive education, they must first receive lengthy and thorough training.
2. Rewarding them with a raise in pay, a bonus, or recognizing them in the ceremony by handing out diplomas and shields would be appropriate.
3. To create research-based teaching methodologies, a centre for guidance, support, and rehabilitation might be developed at the district level so that professionals, careers, and community members may go there for support.
4. It is advised that inclusive education teachers receive professional development programs to help them develop the knowledge and abilities needed to teach students with disabilities.
5. To instruct the administration on how to give the instructors the proper support in inclusive environments.

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